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LILLIAN, GUY HERBERT, III. Two Chapters from Tracks, a Novel in Progress. (1973) Directed by: Mr. Fred Chappell. Pp. 58.

In the work from which these chapters are drawn, it was my intention to examine thematically the relationship between a mentor and a protege and the general concept of betrayal and entrappment. For this purpose I have chosen a story set in a northern territory in the year after the Civil War, and as major characters an adolescent boy who has grown up in the environment of his father's farm, and a Union officer who has purchased land adjacent to the boy's home. Through the events of the year from the fall of 1865 through the winter of 1866, the boy, Cary McMillan, grows in his comprehension of his own situation in the territory, finds frustration in his knowledge of the farmer's life laid out for him, seeks escape through the lifestyle of the officer, Captain Hiram L. Joseph, and finally finds frustration there also when he discovers the officer to be a fraud and criminal. Cary McMillan has a choice at the end of the novel between a free life based on an image he knows to be a lie--the Captain's stories--and the "wasted" life of the farm. Through his story I hope to explore frustration, betrayal, growth and hope as human emotions.

The two chapters from this work in progress presented here both involve the relationship between the protagonist and the Captain. An agreement between the boy's father and Captain Joseph in Chapter One to have a cow serviced leads to the events of Chapter Two; in Chapter Four Cary and the officer hunt in the mountains above their

farms. In the course of these chapters Cary hears war stories spun by the Captain; his subsequent behavior displays the influence the stories have had on him.

TWO CHAPTERS FROM TRACKS,
A NOVEL IN PROGRESS

by

Guy H. Lillian III

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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Approved by

Fred Chappell
Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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TRACKS

II. Winter 1865-1866

The dog had her pups, five of them, but three died. The pair that lived were soon puddling around the barn, and before the winter change in the air came down upon the McMillan farm from the mountains the pups ranged, big-pawed and gangly, all over the yard. They got underfoot while the harvest progressed, and Cary's mother more than once tossed them from her kitchen, loose rags of brown fur hurtling from the door. Cary and Edward each chose one for a special pet. Cary took the eldest, a male mongrel with a ring of black fur on his brown flank, and for this mark named him Skillet. Edward's dog was dubbed Joshua by his master, even though their father pointed out that the dog was a bitch.

Timothy McMillan's bawlings were full-throated by the time the first snow clouds appeared black and heavy in the north, a month after his birth. Emily McMillan kept him close to her breast. She hurried about the house more than she usually did, and the annoyance she always held towards her older boys was more intense to Cary's ears than it had ever been before. That was Timothy's fault, the unending bawl, bawl, bawl. Sometimes Cary wished there was a way to kidnap his brother, stuff him into a knapsack and trade him to the savages that roamed, according to tale, over the mountains. Nights were the times he actually took to devising plots for that purpose, nights when he rolled himself up with what quilt he could pull away from Edward, and tried to muffle his ears against the bawling beneath

the floor. At first he tried to involve Edward in the plans, but nothing could be done with Edward.

"You better just hush your mouth, Cary McMillan. God will do it for you, you don't. Thinking about your own brother that way, that's a sin!"

Cary would make his sin twice as awful, hearing this, crowding the knapsack with both his brothers. Thenceforth he kept his misery private, and confided only to Nibble as they rode and to Skillet, who slept beside him in the loft.

Winter was not a month along before time came, Cary's father decided, to take Annabella to Captain Joseph's farm to be serviced. There was much work going on in the territory to the north, to judge by the many men on horseback the driving wagons who had been seen crossing the ridge above the McMillan farm. Several times the sound of axes had come from the forests. The snow didn't stop the activity; there were twice as many figures on the ridge and more chopping sounds from the woods.

"He's hurrying to get things ready," Cary's father told him as he handed his son Annabella's rope. Cary, astride Nibble, wound the end of the twisted hemp around one thick glove. His father's breath broiled up at him in the morning cold. "We shouldn't dally any further. Try to be home before dark, now."

"Yes, Pa. Come on, cow." Cary nudged Nibble into a walk to the northwest, and tied the rope to the saddlehorn. Leaving the house behind he felt a strange guilt, and turned to watch his father walk back into the barn. Well, don't blame yourself, he

thought. He told you to go, didn't he? So he had, but that didn't help. The boy still felt unhappy. As he moved out onto the snow-covered fields a sharp wind blew snow onto his face, and Cary bowed his head to get his hat in the way of the icy blast. A few seconds later he noticed a brown paw padding alongside Nibble's hooves, and heard Skillet's yipyip.

"Hey, dog! Get back to the house. Get back there!"

Skillet leaped with joyous desperation for Cary's leg. Within the stirrup the boy kicked gently at the soft black nose, then turned to shout "Hey, Pa!" A moment passed and Samuel McMillan appeared from the barn.

"Here, dog!" The farmer's shout came to his son lightly. "Come here ... Skillet."

The young dog hesitated a moment by Nibble's still forelegs, looking back, tail wagging. "Go on back, Skillet," Cary said, and sighed relieved as his dog bounded back along its tracks, rump high. Cary kneed Nibble onwards.

It wasn't difficult to pull Annabella to the northwest fence. Cold as she probably was, she likely welcomed the motion. The fence when they reached it must have frightened her, because though she stood still while Cary dismounted to pull down the slats between two of the upright posts, and lay them carefully in the powdery new snow, she had to be hauled through. She lowed protestingly and tried to turn against the pull of the rope. "What ails you, critter?" Cary demanded, irritated all the more because across this valley, between the brown foothills to the whitecapped

distant mountains and this ridge, he saw a pillar of grey smoke rising. That had to be the officer's place. A goal in sight was more a goal for the boy. "Fool cow," he said, and he dug Nibble with his knees to drag her between the posts and through onto the Captain's land.

The origin of the smoke, before very long, was seen: a cluster of buildings, shacks and tents around a central construction which looked to Cary as he approached to be an almost-completed barn. Two or three men were on the roof, figures dark against the snow behind them. Wagon ruts led, black in the whiteness, from the ridge closer to Cameron to the barn, and around it the ground was dark with hoofprints. As Cary led the cow close he heard the whack of hammering and a few shouts. The snow beneath Nibble's hooves began to slush and finally, as he reined her to a stop by the door to the new barn, pulled at her footing as mud.

Cary hesitated a confused moment, then called to a passing man, "Mister, where is Captain Joseph?"

The man craned his head back to look up at Cary. His face was brown beneath white stubble, and loose. His mouth hung open and Cary flinched back a bit; the man's teeth were black and twisted. After a moment of gazing at the boy, and making him most uncomfortable, the man jerked his thumb towards the doorway to the barn and walked on.

Cary tied Nibble's reins to a wagon in the yard, then took Annabella's rope and pulled her into the barn. The ground was covered with wet straw, and patches of sunlight shone through the unfinished roof. Above him Cary heard the blows of hammers. For a moment Cary

stood in the lesser light and allowed his eyes to adjust. There were several men in the large barn. Cary sought the tallest and saw him, bareheaded, at the far end of the barn. Even without his uniform, dressed like the others in coveralls, Captain Hiram L. Joseph stood out.

Before the Captain a large bull stood in a stall. Its bellowing filled the barn as Cary and Annabella entered. The Captain turned, saw the boy and said, "Well, this is perfect timing," loudly and heartily.

The boy blushed. "Here she is, Captain," he fairly shouted.

"So I see," the man replied. "Clarabelle, isn't she? I'll see to it later, Hank." The man with whom he had been talking moved away.

"No sir. Annabella." Cary extended the rope toward the Captain, who came forward to take it. "She didn't give me a bit of trouble, no sir."

"Well, that's a fine critter. Look what this good lad has brought for you, General."

Cary jumped, startled, but laughed as the Captain pulled Annabella to the bull's stall. The bull was General, and his bellowing grew louder and fuller. He began to stamp and snort as the officer backed Annabella into the stall, and nosed at her trembling flanks as Captain Joseph closed the gate.

The gate to the stall rocked briefly and Cary backed and half turned away. He remembered the lashing he'd got that time Pa caught him watching as Buster and Venus rutted in the yard.

The sin was in the observance, the farmer had said. Captain Joseph, Cary noticed, only smiled as he reached over the gate and slapped hard hide.

"That's what makes good cattle," he said to Cary. "A good sire and a strong dam. This will be good stock, a lucky calf." He came toward Cary and laid an arm on his shoulder. They walked toward the barn doors. "I had a good father--a very brave man--and my mother was pioneer stock; her family was the first to settle in the Missouri territory, you know. Strong folk."

Outside, the Captain led Cary around the side of the barn to a canvas Army tent erected close to another construction, smaller than the barn and still a skeleton of beams and bracings without walls. Within the tent a cot, a chair, and a table with a bottle, lantern, and writing materials were the only furnishings. Captain Joseph sat on the bed and at his gesture Cary sat himself in the hardbacked chair at the desk. It rattled and squeaked as he moved. "Make yourself comfortable, lad. The General will take a while. Do you want some coffee?"

Coffee! "Thank you, sir; yes sir!" He had never had any coffee before. That was Pa's drink. The boys never got anything more grown-up than hot milk as they came in from the snow. The Captain ducked through the tent's canvas flaps and returned in a moment with a tin coffee pot and two tin cups. Setting these on the table he poured steaming liquid. "You be careful now. It's hot." He returned to his cot with his cup. Cary gingerly lifted the steaming metal rim towards his face and hesitated, the bitter

vegetable smell filling his nose. Touching the thin brown stuff his lip jerked back from the scalding heat, but Captain Joseph didn't appear to notice.

"So tell me, lad. Your mother and baby brother--how are they?"

"Fine, sir. Timothy ... he's really a loud one, sir." He smiled at the Captain, and tried another sip from the hot cup. The coffee flamed on his tongue and he swallowed it fast; it passed like a coal down his throat. It was bitter stuff. Cary couldn't repress a grimace. "That's ... pretty strong," he said, and the Captain smiled kindly. The boy tried again and got another hot swallow down; that might be enough; he placed the cup on the rough wooden desk.

"My father ... he said to convey his best greetings and wishes."

"Yes, he's a good man, your father. I hope we haven't disturbed him any, all our noise up here."

"Oh no sir. You can hear chopping wood but that's all. The dogs bark a lot."

The Captain nodded. "Well, we'll have the barn ready within the week, and the house soon after that. Devilish stupid of me to come in and start building in winter's grip but it just could not be helped. Could not be."

They sat in silence for a moment. Cary took another tiny sip of his coffee, and found it just as hot as the first. His cupful had hardly been lessened at all. He was about to ask how many men the Captain had working on the place when the officer spoke, his

gaze down at a corner of the tent, and seemingly from deep thought.

"Yes, they will bark, won't they?"

"Who, sir?"

"Dogs, lad. You said your dogs barked at my men. God yes they will bark, and at men so far away you'd never think anything could see or smell or hear them. And then sometimes the same dogs will let an army march right up to the back porch and through your pantry without so much as a woof."

"Army?"

"Yes. it happened to me." Captain Joseph gazed deeply at Cary and nodded, squinting, his words filled with an unimpeachable air of fact and experience. "One dog cost me the finest soldier it was ever my pleasure to command, while another just ... let us on through. Rebels could have had us like Jesus with the Jews if he'd so much as barked once."

Cary blinked. Command? He did not understand. "Are you talking about the war, sir?"

The Captain nodded, his eyes again on the rumpled and muddy canvas floor. Cary felt the small of his back itch, and his forearms, and the underside of his right ear. "When--when was this, sir? Was it a battle or--"

"It was just before the battle of Plimpsburg," the Captain said. "You haven't heard of Plimpsburg because it has been kept silent, our sacrifices there have been kept silent. John Hinshaw's death was only one of many that should not have been." The Captain was still a moment. "The General in charge could have taken that

town directly, but he ... hesitated, boy, he hesitated. Coward, fool, coward and fool."

"What did he do? Who?"

"All right, lad. Plimpsburg is--Plimpsburg, Arkansas. Do you know where that is?"

It was south of that valley, far south, Cary knew. He remembered the name Arkansas from the map at school.

"It went slave early on, and Plimpsburg was the headquarters of a Confederate batallion that was sent there to Arkansas"--he pronounced the word "Are-Kansas"--"from Louisiana to make sure it stayed slave. Plimpsburg was an important railroad junction at the time. They grew corn there, had their markets in Plimpsburg. It was a rich town, Lord yes, it was rich. About as rich a town as the rebels had north of New Orleans and west of Atlanta."

These were names that had come to Cary through his father's night orations, and lessons from Mr. Porter in geography and history. He nodded briskly to show that he knew them.

"Mine was not a regular detachment, lad. I was commander of a company of the bravest, most careful, professional soldiers in Union blue. My God when I think of those men--Ralph Haas; Andrew Cawthorne; St. John Murphy--some dead now, some gone God knows where ... But at any rate, John Hinshaw must have been the finest of the bunch. He was my ... lieutenant. I don't know if you appreciate the closeness of the relationship between a company commander and his second-in-command, but it is brotherly, lad. It was more than brotherly. We shared decisions--mistakes and honor both. In him and in him only

could I confide my doubts, my worries about decisions. The men must never know if a commander is afraid, it would sack their morale. But a second-in-command like ... Hinshaw, him I could trust. My troubles would be off my chest and would never reach my men. John Hinshaw was a good man."

Cary watched the Captain tremble.

After a moment's pause Captain Joseph continued. "What happened was this. My company was part of a battallion assigned the duty of capturing Plimpsburg. We were no typical group of fighting men; we were guerillas, adept at moving in secret and living off the land. A regular army announces its presence before the enemy; we were small, we could get past them and strike with surprise. Usually we operated free of any ... big-shirt general's control. We hit, we ran, we did ... what we were ordered to do, you understand?--"

"Yes sir," whispered Cary.

"--but we did it our own way. Every army has such companies. We are a tactical necessity." The Captain nodded. "Believe me, we knew best. So when that damnfool general called in the commander--when he called me in for a strategic conference I said, 'Sir, we can take that town direct'. I knew we could. It was my business to know it. That batallion of Confederates was up the line, up the tracks ... on maneuvers; yes ... I knew that ... my scouts had seen them. So I told that general, 'Sir, there aren't any Confederates in that town, we can go in there direct'. But did that blue-button West Point peckerwood pay me any mind? No, damn him!" Cary bit his lip.

The Captain shook his head. "He ... he said, 'We must be sure.' 'Sir, I am sure,' I said, but that fool, he said, 'Captain Joseph, have a platoon of your guerillas reconnoitre the town.'"

"What, sir? Recon what?"

"Reconnoitre, lad. It means, go in and look about. Find out what's there and come back. He wanted me to send in my men and find out what I already knew. He thought that because my men had seen a few rebels that the great mass of them hadn't gone. But I knew better. Hell, the rebels went out on maneuvers all the time, all the time. I knew how Johnny Reb behaved. I've lived in the south and I know its people. I know how those greybacked crackerbrains behave. They were out on maneuvers and we could go right in. But 'reconnoitre,' the general said, so at night I and four of my men rode down from the hills, where our headquarters was, you see, and right into Plimpsburg."

"Right into the town? Didn't the rebs see your clothes--your uniforms?"

"Smart of you to think of that lad. No, we had changed into rebel grey before going in. Only our accents could have brought suspicion on us, so I gave orders that only I and ... Hinshaw ... Hinshaw, right would do any talking. He came from Maryland I believe and I come from Ohio on the Mississippi, where all dialects mix. It wasn't too late as we went in--perhaps, ah, well, just after sundown. So we went to the one best place for the gathering of information there is. You know where that is, lad? One in every town and there every lip is unlocked. The saloon, lad. Plimpsburg had them just as Cameron does--well, didn't we get your mother's doctor out of one?

Well, three of us, myself and Hinshaw and a sergeant named Ralph Haas went inside, and left the other men out with the horses. The moment I pushed open those swinging doors--you know those swinging doors on saloons?--I knew I was right. Not a soldier in the place. Just a few old codgers sitting around, who stared at us strange. I said to the bartender 'Listen, friend, I want Colonel McMillan of C Company, got a message for him.'"

Cary blushed a little and smiled at the Captain's affected drawl. Beneath his moustache Captain Joseph showed a grin himself.

"And this man said, 'Well lieutenant,' for I wore a reb lieutenant's uniform, 'I don't know that man, but General Fitzhugh's whole batallion is out on maneuvers.' You see, I had been correct all the time."

"Was there really a rebel colonel with my name?"

The Captain laughed. "Oh no, lad. I just made that up. Actually, I cannot recollect what name I did use, but it has no importance. I was right, the town was as empty as Tuesday's jug. Hinshaw and Haas and I rode back towards the edge of town.

"Now ..." Captain Joseph hesitated, then nodded to himself and went on. "Now we had passed on the way into Plimpsburg the home of its mayor--this was a grand white house with four white pillars in the façade, way off from the center of town. And this man was rich, lad, a rich slaver. His barn was crowded with horses and there were graves, niggers' graves, in the back. We rode over those graves on the way into town. On the way back we decided we would try and capture the mayor and get his horses and any food he had,

take it back to our comrades. My men had not been eating well. We were hungry in those hills. I wanted them to eat better than they had been before the battle. It's a natural concern for a commander to have for his men. So, on the way back I and another man--it must have been Ralph Haas, yes, it was him--we went to the front door and knocked. The others stayed out of sight. Well, a nigger came to the door and told us his master was asleep. I told the nigger I had a hurt man out here and that he knew the mayor and that I was from out of the area--that was true enough--and that I didn't know where the batallion was. It was a masterpiece, I tell you, of lying, even though it is easy to lie to a nigger, and all to get the mayor downstairs. The nigger ran off to get him and didn't even shut the door, didn't even shut it. Hinshaw and the other boys just went on in. I told them to hide in the shadows till I called out."

Captain Joseph laughed, "The mayor came down in his nightshirt. Ah, lad, you should have seen that fat, bald old fool come down those stairs in his nightshirt. I stood there with Haas, and were just as polite-looking as any dandy New Orleans reb ever was, and we smiled as that man came down the stairs. We did it mostly to fool him, but he was funny, too. Never let up your guard on a man because he seems funny, lad. The mayor was cautious; he had a pistol.

"Hinshaw and the others were standing in shadows by the stairway, back of it. We could see them, too. And as that mayor reached the bottom of those stairs, well, there was this little French mongrel, a poodle--you know those little French mongrels, look like rats?--well, this dog came running down with him, just yipping and yapping.

"And when that dog reached the bottom of those stairs he whirled right around and yipyipyipped right up to my man. Hinshaw kicked at him and I could see him look scared all of a sudden, and that fat mayor saw him and knew, I suppose, what we were there for, and he raised his pistol and shot poor Hinshaw dead as a stick before we could do a thing about it."

"My God," Cary murmured.

"Just like that, shot him and he fell down ... I remember he hit a table, with a lamp on it, and that all went over. By then ... well by then we had our firearms and we shot that mayor, and his nigger, and I myself personally shot that miserable dog." The Captain looked across the tent at the boy with the solemn look of the instructor. "We got the horses and the food, and the next day we took the town, Plimpsburg. But my friend, he died. He was killed."

"My God," Cary said. He felt in his chest a growing weight of loss, and he hadn't even known the man.

The Captain winked. "You get used to it. Well. Finished with your coffee?"

Cary took a swift sip of the chilly, bitter stuff. "You--you must've spent a lot of time in the war."

The Captain laughed easily, and Cary felt a brightening of mood in the tent. "Yes, lad; too long." He stood and Cary followed him out. Hands in pockets, Captain Joseph surveyed the construction.

"My Pa ... he wasn't in the war."

"He wasn't? Well, that was fortunate, wasn't it? I am building to last, as you see. Strong frame. Six rooms."

"I think he didn't go 'cause of our religion. He couldn't go. But I know plenty of people who got killed."

"Oh do you?" They walked slowly back towards the entrance to the barn. The ground was mucky with footprints laid over hoofprints and wagon wheel ruts.

"Yes sir. Jim Heckman's daddy and Herbert Knutson, Emma's big brother. I go to school with Emma."

The Captain stopped, his head back. "Noon," he shouted up to the barn roof. A man's head appeared over the side, and Captain Joseph repeated, "Noon!" The head disappeared and Cary and the Captain went into the barn. "Noon," the officer told the men inside. They turned from their work and headed out. In the stall at the rear they heard a clatter; Annabella moved away from General, who still nosed at her throat.

"I think she's had enough of you, General," the Captain said, laughing. "I think we'll get ourselves a calf out of today, lad. Did you say you go to school?"

"Yes sir. Mr. Porter's school about--"

"Well, of course you go to school. I never had much schooling myself. Five years worth. More than many, I suppose."

"Yes sir. I've been going for five years myself. My brother and I, we've been out a few days since the snow started, but we have got to go back tomorrow."

The Captain led Annabella out of the stall and slapped her flank. "Good girl, good girl." He handed her rope to Cary. The boy looked the cow over nose to tail, and bent to glance quickly at her udder, but could see nothing different about her.

"Captain Joseph, sir ..."

"Lad?"

"Well, sir, I was wondering, if you would mind, sir, if I came over here, when you got your house built, I mean."

The Captain smiled kindly. "A neighbor's visit would be a happy thing." He once again seemed in jovial spirits. "No one's company I'd enjoy more than yours, lad. You come around whenever it suits your fancy."

They pushed through the doors into the noon cold. A line of about ten men had queued up beside a low tent out in the yard, and cooks steamed steaming soup into bowls in each man's hand. "Come back when you will," Captain Joseph said, as Cary untied Nibble from the wagon and mounted her, pulling the rope tight again around the saddlehorn. 'I will tell you more about things you would like. The war ..."

The boy beamed. "Yes sir. I would like that."

"My best to your folks!" the officer shouted in farewell, and Cary, leaving the compound slowly, turned to see the Captain's final wave before he turned to join his men.

"You lie!" Edward whispered.

"I swear it's so. That is what he told me."

"I still say you lie!"

"As Jesus Christ and God Almighty Himself as my judge." Cary held up his right hand in the loft's darkness. He was kneeling atop the quilts, and Edward lay beneath them on his side of their huge bed. Once this room had been their grandfather's and they had slept in the front room next to the fire place. Up here it was much colder but the bed was soft and their mama had said, "No child of mine will sleep on the floor while I'm able!"

"Lies from hellfire, Cary. You know there ain't no such town as Plimpsburg."

It was late, the McMillans had long since retired to bed. The brothers had laid awake for an hour as Cary retold the Captain's story and Edward, in harsh whispers, decried it.

"How would I know that?" Cary replied. "You tell me how I would know that. And how do you know there ain't?"

"There ain't!"

"You have never been outside this territory, Edward. I know that for a fact. And you ain't got no way of knowing that there is no town of Plimpsburg in Arkansas, now do you?"

"There, you said it. You said there ain't no Plimpsburg in Arkansas."

The chill in the room caused Cary to shiver, and he stepped over Skillet to slip into his side of the bed.

"Get your cold feet off me," Edward exploded.

"Move over. Get on your own side of the bed." Feet nudged and fiercely kicked at intrusions into established mattress territory. "Listen," the elder boy said, "I tell you what I will do. We'll ask Mister Porter tomorrow if there wasn't a battle of Plimpsburg."

That hushed Edward for a moment. "You just do that," he said bravely, "I dare you."

Footsteps thumped in the room below and the boys flinched as they heard them on the ladder to their loft. They were instantly silent and still. Their father was up, and they knew from many previous nights that he had his razor strap in hand.

A moment passed and there were no more footsteps on the ladder. The boys heard their father's heavy footfall move back into his bedroom and breathed easier.

Bodies shuddered farther down into covers. Final whispers spat. By Cary's side of the bed, just within scratching range, Skillet slept. Cary reached over to scratch the large floppy ears.

"Sure are a good dog," he murmured.

"Sh!" Edward commanded.

Cary and Edward woke before the loft was light. They woke together the way they always did. They shiveringly dressed; the room seemed colder in the morning than it ever did at night. Swiftly they made their way down the ladder into the front room where their father already had the fire going; they stuck their feet towards the blaze and let the heat singe their soles. Their mother was clacking things together over the stove, but the boys helped their father at his chores before eating. They set out food for their dogs, since they insisted on being the first ones to breakfast; they threw hay to their horses and cows; they drew water from the well with much argument over who had to scrape his palms on the frozen rope. Then they returned to the kitchen for their own meal, while, as part of the schoolday ritual, Samuel McMillan saddled their horses for the ride.

As he had thought he might, Cary figured this trip to be a waste of time. "We'll be practically alone, Mama," he protested. "It snowed last night and no one at all will come."

Mrs. McMillan turned from the stove, Timothy squirming in the crook of her arm. Her face held a grimace Cary knew to be the utter

refutation of his hopes. "I cannot answer for those people who allow their children to behave so." She said no more, but as Cary had thought even before he had spoken, the matter was settled.

They gathered their school materials, what pencils they could find, bundled again in coats and gloves and pulled on their hats and went outside, where Nibble and Mercury snorted mist and stamped in the snow.

They dawdled along the way, pausing in the woods just over the ridge from the farm to chase a scampering fox from beneath a bush across a field to the bank of a stream. The tangent did not take much time, yet they hurried towards Cameron afterwards, afraid that their first day at school in so long would bring them a licking if they began it so late. In the morning cold it was easy to ride swiftly, for despite the sting in their faces the air made them both feel like shouting. This though they did not do, since they knew the icy air would singe their throats.

The sun had been up only a few shivering moments when they had left their father's farm, and had risen less than an hour's height by the time they found themselves on the road to Cameron, and by the schoolhouse gate. A few horses already stood in the three-sided enclosure built to shield the students' mounts. They exchanged guilty glances at being late. Edward rushed across to the schoolhouse door the moment he had Mercury safely tied, but Cary lingered longer as he followed the smudged tracks of his brother and the others from the stable to the school. Even from here the mountain range to the west was visible, and the boy paused before the door to

gaze at their shining distance. It took him a moment to pull himself through the door and into Mr. Porter's schoolhouse.

The comparative warmth of the room rushed through him as he closed the door behind him. He hacked back a sudden clot of mucous from his nostrils and swallowed it before returning the greeting of the fat old man at the front of the room.

"And good morning to the elder Mr. McMillan."

"Good morning, Mr. Porter."

Cary quickly pulled off his snow-flecked coat, hurrying along the close wall. There were coat pegs between the windows and Cary hung it on one of these. He laid the book and pencils on the rough surface of an empty desk and sat quickly on the bench. Besides Edward, already in his usual seat in the front of row against the other wall, Emma Knutson was there, her face turned towards him without expression. Her blonde hair was tied in an old woman's bun behind her head, with a white ribbon. Next to her, in the middle row, Danny Cassidy picked his nose with his usual relaxed boredom, right underneath the elevated desk of Mr. Porter himself. He sat there as punishment; even thrashings did not deter him from chewing bits of paper to soggy pulp and hurling the slimy wads at his fellow scholars. Jennifer Shale, behind him, was the oldest student there at 16, two years senior to Cary; her rounded chest was testament to that. Some dozen other chairs filled the room, and half were themselves filled with other Cameron citizens of Cary's age.

"Well, Mr. McMillan the elder, let us hear from you the multiples of seven."

Cary looked up at the large figure in front of them all, the Cameron teacher, Mr. Porter, rotund, bald at the crown, his head the size and hue of a pumpkin, seated as was his habit of years on the edge of his high desk, the ink bottle dangerously close to his coat tail. From his billowing frame Mr. Porter's thin legs dangled not quite all the way to the floor; often he would add to his students' nervous misery by rhythmically rapping his bootheels against the wood, or squeaking an extended toe along the floor. As always, an edition of McGuffey was in his hand, high to his puffy face like a chicken breast, and his small fur-browed eyes peered with calm expectancy at the boy.

"Yes sir ... yes sir. Seven times one is seven."

A boy in the middle row guffawed sharply. Cary stiffened the impulse to rise and follow the laughter to its unlucky source; instead he slipped through the tables rapidly. "Times two is fourteen, times three is twenty-one, times four is twenty-eight ..." "Times twelve is ...," when reached, caused his only pause, for he had not memorized past times ten. The eventual "eighty-four" won a praise of "Very fine" from the teacher, who then turned on the laugher for the tables for eight.

Arithmetic was the usual beginning of a day; calculation of an unpassionate sort, Mr. Porter often explained, helped awaken the mind, stimulate the currents of thought which they would later ride to conclusions of truth on history, literature, philosophy, the more important matters. Cary did not understand his teacher's rationale at all, or really comprehend the value of these studies; he

was not alone in this doubtfulness, as less than half of the people his age in the Cameron area were freed from farm work or trade apprenticeship for Mr. Porter's school. But Samuel McMillan liked the teacher, indeed had himself sat in this schoolhouse many years past, and believed his sons should absorb all the teacher had to say. The phrase quoted was, "An open mind is the greatest hymn," a pithiness which so perplexed the elder boy that he rode off to school when argued without serious argument.

The mathematical questions made the class rounds, after which Mr. Porter nodded in the way which bespoke satisfaction. He then touched upon history with the Pilgrim story. Cary listened, his interest sparked only by the role, of Indians. He had seen some, drunken old sacks, in the streets of Cameron; savages wandered he was told vast and flourishing beyond the mountains. But the tame heathens of Mr. Porter's story seemed to share but the label "Indian" with the legends. The old man took some time telling the pointless story, then paused and smiled at the class. The hand holding the McGuffey did not waver, but the teacher did lean back slightly and, for the first time, focus his eyes on the page. Cary squirmed. From the silent pursings of the teacher's mouth, silent words forming, he judged that the least comprehensible hour of the day was about to commence.

"'Elegy in a Country Churchyard,'" Mr. Porter intoned, "by Thomas Gray, 1716 to 1771."

One of the bolder boys near the back of the room groaned, shielded by the girl seated ahead of him. Cary stifled his identical

impulse. Nightly, believing that the missing of Sunday services was a sin that must be assuaged even though they lived a good hour and a half of buggy ride from the nearest church, Cary's mother would assemble her sons before the fireplace and force them to read chapters aloud from her huge black Bible. Mr. Porter's verses were almost as insufferable, and just as useless to Cary's point of view. As he sat in full view of the old man, however, he kept silent, allowing himself only a quiet sigh. The thin cane that leaned against Mr. Porter's desk was within easy reach of the aged teacher.

"'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day, The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea ...'"

Now you see there? Cary said to himself, already bored to stultification. No one but Thomas Gray, dead a hundred years, or Mr. Porter, whom he swore must have been dead twice that long, knew what all that could be. "Curfew." "Knell." "Lea." Lee's a rebel general and nothing more. The foolishness of the thing filled Cary with frustrated fury. To fight back he let his eyes unfocus, and turned his ears inward where he heard again Captain Joseph's tragic story. What were those names again? Cary searched his mind. One should not forget such names. Hinshaw was the one who got killed. There was another one--House. Close to that. Hass. Haas.

The teacher's eyes rose from the page to glare about the class, in which a small murmur of talk had risen. It ceased at once and despite himself, Cary was alert once again to the poem.

"'Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield ...'"

Farmers, Cary sighed. Mr. Porter was ever reading them stuff about farmers. Perhaps he thought that the closeness of his charges to the subject would attract them more. Well, to hell with it. Cary was bored by farmer poems and farmer stories.

My God, the boy thought, and his gaze fell suddenly to the much-gouged surface of his desk. I am a farmer. Pa is a farmer and I'm to be one. I'm to be a farmer. I am to work that farm the way Pa has and Gramps did before him, for all my life. And Edward too. And Edward, of course, was listening raptly.

"'Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire...'"

Cary listened now, not only to the poem, but to his heart. It beat as if his ribs were the bars of some cage.

Out. Out.

Mr. Porter leaned away from his book for a moment. "To these lines, class," he said, "pay special note. They are deservedly famous.

"'Full many a gem of purest ray serene
the dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.'"

Waste. The word singed Cary McMillan. This territory had no sand, but he knew that a desert was more than sand and cactuses and Indians. It was emptiness, and nothingness. Hell was a desert. God yes, he knew what Mr. Porter told them through this poem, even if he did it without meaning to. He told them where they were--a desert. A damned place in hell where instead of fire there was snow--

and crops. Hell was a farm, Hell was their farm. Cary cast a desperate look across the small, hot room at his brother. Edward had to be told. They had to leave, run. To go to Plimpsburg. To the mountains. But Edward of course had his eyes fastened on their fat old fool of a teacher.

"'The Epitaph,'" Mr. Porter read in especially heavy tones that bespoken the close of the reading.

"'Here rests his head upon the lap of earth,
a youth, to fortune and to fame unknown;
fair science frowned not on his humble birth
and melancholy marked him for her own...'"

Marked? Oh hell yes.

The poem was done, and as always when he finished one of his readings Mr. Porter shut his eyes a moment and smiled to himself. It seemed to Cary, even in his leadened spirits, that their old teacher could have just finished a big meal and was working up a burp. And sure enough the burp came. "Wonderful!" Mr. Porter whispered.

The hours passed with the slowness of straw descending, and they were as irritating to the skin. The Franklin stove in the rear of the school blasted forth copious heat, and despite the snow spread so invitingly outside the windows there was sweat on the boy and his rear stuck to the wood. He constantly shifted back and forth on the bench.

Finally the McGuffey's snapped shut in Mr. Porter's hand, a signal which brought a general stir of life to the benumbed group.

There would be a short session of questions on the lessons of the day and then they would be released. Mr. Porter rocked forward; his heels clacked against the hollow desk.

"Miss Knutson," he said, and Cary saw Emma's round, yellow-framed face start and her lower lip tremble, just a little. "Let us hear the nines from you, please."

The girl blinked twice, rapidly. It was a strange thing for girls to be in school at their children's age, Cary's Ma had said. A sign of the advanced times, Cary's Pa had replied. Emma said, "Yes, Mr. Porter," in a soft little voice, and went through the nines to 99 with no hesitation. Cary glanced from the short girl seated behind his brother to Jennifer Shale in the row between them. Jennifer leaned back on her bench, and had caught the desk with her knees to keep from falling over. Her bosom swelled with her every breath, a phenomenon Cary observed steadily until he heard Mr. Porter say, "Now Mr. McMillan," and he jerked his head quickly to the teacher once more.

But the teacher's face was towards Edward. "Mr. McMillan, can you remember the leader of the pilgrims?"

Edward quickly covered his ignorance. "Mr. Porter, was there a battle of Plimpsburg?"

The teacher's face started in surprise, and Cary felt like leaping the middle aisle to mash this son of a bitch who shared his name. Obviously his younger brother sought glory in the teacher's eyes, and he would be damned if he allowed that. He spoke up.

"Yes sir ... Plimpsburg in Arkansas, sir."

"Plimpsburg ..." The old man's eyes were down and his feet were still. He was thinking. Cary felt warmly aware of the attention of his fellows.

"Yes sir ... Captain Hiram L. Joseph told me all about the battle of Plimpsburg in Arkansas, Mr. Porter. He said it was the most important battle ... or one of them, anyway..."

"Plimpsburg.. "The teacher shook his head. "I don't recall it from the newspapers ... when did this--who did you say?"

"Captain Hiram L. Joseph, sir. He owns the land north of my pa's. He was there and he told me all about it."

The old man said, "I can't recall reading about it--but I will try to find out about it. We should like to hear that story I should think, Mr. Elder McMillan. In the meantime, good day, scholars."

Cary joined the general rush for the coat pegs and the door. The winter air crashed through his head like a ball of flame once the door was flung open and he had stepped out into the snow, which crunched beneath his boots. As the other came forth he sensed the special regard in their glances and smiled even as he blushed. Edward came out scowling unsurely; had Cary insulted him by his speaking-out or not? Emma followed him and Cary gulped as walked right up to him, still buttoning her coat. The noon sun shone on her head, and though she did not smile Cary blushed the worse for having her look upon him.

"I believe you," she said.

"Huh? What?"

"I believe you that there was such a battle. Herbert was in all kinds of battles and I believe you." She turned and drifted slowly towards the horse shelter. On the way she passed Edward, already riding Mercury out. The younger brother looked down at Cary with the same uncertain grimace.

"Well, come on you," he snarled. "Pa has work waiting."

After dinner that night, just as the daylong blue was purpling in the east towards rapid evening, Samuel McMillan drove a stake in the center of the snowcovered yard between house, coop, barn and pens. He tied Cary's Skillet to it at the end of a long tether. "Why are you doing this, Pa?" Cary finally found the courage to ask. But the farmer would not answer. "It is only for a night or so," he said. His father's act seemed to have purpose, one he was not to know. He went to that night's Bible lesson by the fireside with Skillet's yelps loud to him through the walls, and Edward's vigorous roughouse with Joshua an insulting sneer at his pet's plight.

"Pay attention," Mrs. McMillan commanded, rocking Timothy by the fire. "Go get the book."

He fetched the heavy Bible. It was a family book, the names and facts of generations inked in the middle section between the testaments, four generations worth, counting Cary and his brothers, though Timothy had not yet been added. It had been Granma Cable's Bible, before she died.

"I would like to hear about Daniel," Mrs. McMillan said. "Read to me about Daniel in the den of lions."

Cary knew the story, of course. It had been read many times before by him and Edward as they learned the sense behind the print. He sat on his haunches by his mother's feet, the Bible filling his lap, and flipped the pages back towards the end of the Old Testament.

Cary read the last half of Book Six, the King's repentance. Listening, Emily McMillan rocked gently and with every forward motion pushed against the floor with her toe. On her breast young Timothy slept. Edward scratched at Joshua's belly as the dog rolled on her back. Outside, Skillet had stopped barking. Cary thought, Pa must be with him. That made him feel better.

They went to bed as the clock bonged nine. Samuel McMillan was still outside when Cary dimmed the lamp in their loft and wriggled deep beneath the quilts. His hand dangled idly off the bed and it fretted him when his fingers found only cold floor.

Cary woke with his hand still over the side of the bed, and the room still dark, with none of the tiny slices of light around the base of the ceiling which was the usual sign of morning. He heard it again. The barking of a dog, outside, dimmed by the walls. It was Skillet, barking out there in the yard--and in no way that Cary had heard his dog bark before, rapid, and angry. The sound was very low but he could hear it plainly against the utter silence of the house. The next sound was even more plain. A gunshot.

Cary leaped from the bed and hurtled downstairs from the loft. He ran through the house to the kitchen door, yanked it open and coughed in the sudden cold.

Under the bright half-moon Skillet strained at his tether, pulling it taut behind him as he yelped at something in the west. From that direction a sharp report nipped through the air. "Pa!" Cary yelled. For he could see his father's boot-tracks in the snow, a double line west.

His only answer was another shot, and Skillet's loud baying. The boy's teeth chattered wildly. He stumbled back inside the house, pulled on the first boots he found before the fireplace, found his coat on the kitchen peg, and once more went out into the night. He ran up beside his dog and caught his scruff. Skillet struggled against his hand. "Pa!" Cary shouted.

He followed his father's tracks, running past the coop and out onto the snowcovered fields. "Pa!" he yelled, and this time heard a harsh reply.

"Cary! Is that you?"

"Pa?"

"Stop there! Stop, I say! I'll be right there."

Cary stopped and looked nervously over the fields. The snow looked blue at night, his father's tracks over the slight rise ahead black against it. Over the rise his father's figure soon appeared, hurrying back. He held his rifle.

"What are you doing out here, boy?"

"Pa, what's going on? I heard shots."

The farmer came up to his son. He gasped, "Chasing varmints. I might of got one. We'll see in the morning."

"Varmints? What kind?"

"The worst kind. Second-worst." They walked back toward the house. With the muzzle of his rifle Samuel McMillan indicated the snow by the coop. "That's why I staked out your dog. So he would set up a fuss if they came."

"He surely did that." Cary bent down by the tracks by the coop. They were large and round and many, all he could tell in the night.

"They shouldn't be back. Wolves are smart that way. Come on inside, Cary."

Wolves.

The word shuddered through Cary like the cold. He rose and ran to catch up with his father, who was freeing Skillet from the tether. The dog leaped up at Cary as he came to him.

"Still excited," Samuel McMillan said. "Bring him on inside. And you get to sleep."

IV. Summer 1866

"Here. This is where we cross."

Cary was disappointed. He couldn't even see the mountains. They had ridden along the Bebehanna for two hours and it seemed they would be getting closer, but the blue peaks had vanished in the crowd of foothills.

"It shouldn't wet your britches worse than a bad dream. You want me to go first?"

Nibble took advantage of the pause and seized some grass along the river bank. Cary gazed forlornly at the slowly flowing water.

"It's nothing. You want I should go?"

The Captain plunged the black gelding into the river. Its head high, the horse strained across, and the water sloshed no higher than the edge of the saddle. Captain Joseph held his rifle high above the water.

"See, lad?"

Cary shrugged and clicked Nibble forward. I just bet it's cold, he thought, and was not disappointed when the river rushed into his boots.

"Your rifle, boy! Your rifle!"

Holding the reins clumsily in his left hand Cary reached back desperately to pull his rifle from its sheath. He waved it overhead and the Captain nodded his approval from the opposite bank.

Nibble was letting the current move her to the right, downstream. "Stop it, horse," Cary shouted. She stopped dead, and the river slapped his thighs. Desperately, he kicked at her flanks. The water was still cold. It never got hot in the mountains, whence this torrent flowed, not even now, half the year past the last snowfall.

A few moments wet staggering brought them to the bank, and Cary nearly ripped his horse's head off trying to stay in the saddle.

"Not bad," the Captain observed, "for your first crossing. It was your first river, wasn't it?"

The man was smiling, and Cary forced a grin in return. His feet were soaking inside his boots. "Yes sir. I have to say it was."

"Well, you've crossed it." The Captain started into the trees and Cary followed. He was tremendously hungry. Before hitting the river he'd been sleepy from getting up so long before dawn, but now he wanted to eat. Perhaps he had just tired of riding, but he chided himself for sloth and tried to keep the Captain's brown-clas back in view. It seemed they'd never reach the mountains this way, but then the Captain had said that they would have to settle for a day only out here, and he would have Cary back in his father's house by the morning. And they were obviously many miles from the mountains.

For a while they rode in silence, the wooded hills sloping up beneath their horses' hooves, the woods lively with the beat of wings and the call of birds and the shush of leaves rubbing against one another. When he could avoid remembering the mountains Cary felt the exhileration of discovery and exploration; he had never been this far west, even if it were only a few miles across the familiar Bebehanna.

Around him he felt was danger, or at least the possible promise of danger. And the constant shade from the summer heat was cool. The slope gradually rose more and more acutely, the pace of the man ahead grew slower. Apparently Captain Joseph, though new to this territory, had an instinctive hunter's feel for the land, a knowledge of the best place generally to find deer. Cary admired this greatly. It seemed a way to survive without the other thing, the repititious and dull, the day-to-day. I wonder why on earth he wants to settle in Cameron, the boy asked himself, for the thousandth time. Perhaps he'd give the question voice when they stopped to eat.

Back at his house, before dawn, the Captain had promised a pause at midday when Cary could eat the cakes and dried beef his mother had stowed in Nibble's saddlebag. The Captain's servant, William, had set out nothing for the officer to take; "The lighter I travel the more quickly I move," Captain Joseph explained. "I learned to do without for far more than a day early on. Your mind, it's clearer when you're hungry."

Not that the Captain didn't have plenty. Cary's first look at the house he'd last seen as a frame of boards astonished him; it was not only complete, and much the same as his Pa's house, but was filled with fancy furniture--a chesterfield in the living room, a canopied bed, curtains on the windows--and on the walls, pictures of sternlooking people whom Captain Joseph identified as his ancestors. There were Currier and Ives prints of General Sheridan and General Sherman, and a detailed battle scene etched in fine lines. It was a grand house, and the Captain thanked Cary most

humbly when he told him so. "I have wanted a place for these things for years," he said. "They are prizes and they are worth a lot to me."

The Captain did not wear his uniform anymore but kept it, he said, in an attic trunk with other mementoes of the past war. But he was the same man without the uniform, Cary found, strong enough and brave enough to travel miles into unknown mountains without provisions. Cary felt a little embarassed by the memory of his first sight of Captain Joseph, his awe of the uniform, the silly earnestness with which he had listened to his story while the bull General planted calf in Annabella. Still, it had been exciting. Plimpsville. No, Plimpsburg. Sad and exciting. That seemed to him to sum up everything he had been told about war.

"Captain Joseph," he called. The older man turned his head. "Did you ever fight in mountains like these here?"

"Fight in them? We lived in them, lad. Summer and winter both, in the mountains of Virginia ... and Tennessee ..." The Captain laughed. "So you see, I feel some confidence going up here. Tell you about it up ahead."

That sounded like another story, and close at hand as they and the sun rose higher together. The woods grew thicker, the bird cries more shrill, and seemed unending. The air was cool now on Cary's face. They must be up quite far, he thought, but then he saw that they had merely come to an open area at the crest of the foothills, and before them was a clear view of the mountains. The boy hesitated and stood in Nibble's stirrups, and sighed. They seemed no nearer.

However, from here he could see the gap between peaks through which the Bebehanna flowed. It came down in a silvery band from high in the blue mountains, passed from sight behind brown hills and reappeared some two hundred yards away, rushing and gurgling.

"Ha!" shouted the Captain. "Look at that! Rode all this way and we're right back to the river!" He spurred his horse down the slope, and Cary followed, reaching behind to untie his saddlebag and get at his mother's dried beef. Nibble blundered swiftly down to the river's edge, where already the Captain was stretching his arms wide and yawning voraciously. He seemed to be shouting but the words were washed out by the tumble of the river. Hard to think of this as the slow old Bebehanna, Cary thought. It seemed to bubble and rush, and on the bank, as the dismounted and tied Nibble to a lush bush, he felt coolness rising from it. He went to stand by the Captain, who looked over the river with his hands on his hips.

"What?" Captain Joseph was smiling widely. "What did you say?"

"Nothing, sir. I didn't say nothing."

"God I love this. Nothing like it, eh? Eh? Nothing like it."

"I guess not." Cary smiled himself, sharing the exhileration. Out in the downward-flowing cataract a fish raced desperately upstream, and fell back helpless without making headway. The Captain brought a roll of string from a pocket and pulled a small hook from the crown of his hat. "Find us a worm, boy."

With a heel Cary kicked at the dirt around the base of a tree. The ground was damp and scooping it forth with a toe Cary spotted several sliding, moving brown lengths that could have been earth come to life. He felt the residue of a childhood squeamishness in the back of his throat, but he'd long since overcome that: couldn't

let such a girlish thing get in the way of fishing. Still he shuddered and grimaced when the worm shrivelled on him as he plucked one from the loam. It was supposed to draw up when you took it by the widest of its body segments, but it still revolted him. At arm's length he quickly offered it to the amused Captain.

Captain Joseph smartly skewered the dancing worm and with a smooth underhand motion hurled it into the torrent. "Whoa, whoa," he chided himself, and brought the hook back, winding the string around his right hand. He stepped downstream a few yards to where rocks in the river's path had forced pools to form. Again he cast.

"My equipment isn't fancy, but I will bet you your mother's lunch that I pull in something."

Cary knew better than that. "I think I'll pass." He knelt and washed his fingers in the cold water, and walked back to Nibble. The dried beef was tough, salty, and its taste both bitter and invigorating. He downed it all quickly, seated on a boulder watching the Captain cast and recast his worm, and immediately felt a guilty flinch: what if Captain Joseph caught nothing? But just then the string snapped visibly outwards, and in a few seconds the Captain had pulled a foot long trout from the water and swung it onto the bank. It leaped and slapped against the grass, and made odd croaking sounds. The Captain picked up a stick and clouted it still.

"Now you see why I let William sleep this morning," the Captain laughed. He went to his horse and returned with a frying pan.

Swiftly he cleared a space on the riverbank for a fire and soon the smell of greasy fish was rising to their faces.

"Is this how you ate in the army?" Cary asked.

The Captain chuckled. "When we were very lucky. You know, my outfit was ... well, we didn't operate as part of a regular batallion. We were on our own."

"Yes sir. You told me--last January. When I brought Annabella over."

Captain Joseph's momentary look of puzzlement opened as he caught the memory. "That's right. How'd that calf come out?" He laughed. "The same as usual, right?"

"It ain't yet, sir. Not till fall."

"Well, soon. General has two of my stock with calf now. I think that is the key to prosperity for a new homesteader--such as myself. Build stock quickly. That looks good." He set the pan with the thoroughly broiled fish to one side. "Let's give it a few minutes to cool. Blast! I wish we had us a lemon... You ever had a lemon, boy?"

Cary admitted that he had never heard of lemons.

"They are citrus fruit--like oranges, only much more sour. Lord, are they ever sour. I tasted them often down South."

"During the war?"

"No ... no ... before the war started I went South as far as New Orleans. You should have seen that city. My God, I ate in a place cost me three dollars for a meal."

That was incredible. Cary laughed and shook his head much as Captain Joseph did.

"But it was most delicious--I doubt if ever I have tasted anything that wondrous. Unless it was that chicken, that sweet Georgia chicken ..."

He looked at Cary for a steady solemn moment, and then guffawed and slapped the boy's shoulder. Whatever was going on must be funny, Cary figured, so he grinned. The Captain recovered by lifting the frying pan and checking the fish with a forefinger.

"Ow. Still hot." He poked at it with the hunting knife with which he'd ripped the fish free of innards and scales earlier. "But getting there. No, not even that New Orleans trout almondine--means, covered in almonds--was as good to me as a half-cooked chicken snatched from a rich Georgia slaver."

The Captain pried off a bite and tried it. He chewed it slowly, and the face he made was so full of exaggerated gratification that Cary had to laugh. "Delectable," the man pronounced. "Try it, lad. Eat all you will."

The greasy fish was indeed delectable, even if it did burn his fingers. Together they picked the tiny splinter-like bones clean, and Cary felt well-fed as they sat back on the river's edge and looked out over the frenzied water. Captain Joseph produced a cigar, and lit it with a smoldering stick from the fire. Out here the burning weed was almost sweet to the smell, not like it had been in the city hall, when they had met. Cary recalled that day to the Captain, who chuckled. "Your brother must be walking now," he observed. "Wonderful creatures, young children."

"Do you have any children, Captain Joseph?"

"Yes, lad, have two. But they are both grown now. One is in Pennsylvania and the other is in Boston."

"Boston! You've been as far as Boston?"

"And further," the Captain smiled. "What about you, lad? Where have you gone?"

Cary laughed in a manner he hoped would be brusquely humorous. "Oh I've been to lots of places. I've been to Cameron and school and Cameron and Cameron ..."

The Captain slapped Cary's shoulder. "Well you are plenty young yet. You have plenty of years for that."

"When did you start?"

"Start what? Travel? Lord, I was so small I cannot remember." A fish leapt in the river and the Captain skipped a stone at its splash. "I was an orphan, shuffled from aunt to aunt ... I joined the army when I was fifteen. That's your age, isn't it?"

"No sir. I'm fourteen."

"Well, you're getting there. That was in Virginia, I joined up, got myself shot in the hip during the Mexican war ... Ever hear of Sam Houston?"

"No sir."

"A great man--President of Texas when Texas was a republic. I have stood in his presence. He complimented me on my horsemanship. That was a proud moment."

"Did it ... did it hurt when you got shot?"

"Oh no, not really hurt ... when I said 'hip' I was being

gentlemanly. Where that Mexican took me was all meat. Healed right up."

"How did it happen?"

The Captain flung his cigar into the river. It bobbed downstream, out of sight. "He snuck up on our camp and took up a position behind our lines, in fact hid in a tree overlooking our latrine. You do know what a latrine is? Good. Well he watched for me; I know he had to be waiting for me, because there was a whole queue of men who used it before I did and I was the only one he shot. Straddled out and all he must have thought me the perfect target. It was damned embarassing."

Cary laughed happily at the image. The Captain grinned.

"Did they get the Mexican?" Cary asked momentarily.

"Oh yes ... well, I suppose so. I think I was too busy yelling and hollering to pay much attention. My war wound, my badge of honor. Haw." He shook his head with a grim grin that had Cary laughing again. "War is a horrible thing, lad, but as you see it has its good--well, its funny anyway--parts to it."

Cary sobered instantly, thinking of the death of John Hinshaw.

"Your father ... his religious beliefs ... are they yours also?"

Cary was confused. "What, sir?"

"You heard me. He taught you ... any of that?"

The boys considered. His Pa was a quiet man; he spoke only on vital matters and when necessary. He had never spoken much of their religion; it was a thing understood, he felt, among his family,

but now that the Captain asked him about it, he could not think of the words to explain it. "He ... he don't talk about it much. I don't know if...." Cary floundered. He had no idea of what to say.

"Well, that's just what he said, that Sunday ..."

"Easter."

"Yes, lad, Easter, yes. He did tell me that he did not hold you to his beliefs. I think that smart, and admirable."

Cary thought it embarrassing, all this talk about his father; somehow it was disquieting, like having him and Captain Joseph together in the same place, it made him uncomfortable, closed-in. He was relieved when the Captain went on.

"I had a soldier under me--young, young fellow, barely older than you--who broke away from his father's view of things ... and you know, I'm of two minds on what it all meant. Did it make him a hero? Or just another dead soldier? Quite honestly I do not know.

"Now this boy, his name was ..." He considered a moment, then stated definitely, "Cawthorne. Yes, that was it. Billy Cawthorne. He came from some rich New England family. Oh bloody rich they were. His father was a minister--a Presbyterian minister. I never did trust Presbyterians; you'll pardon me."

Cary frowned. Reverend Hill was dirt poor, and made a point of it. He could hardly imagine a man of God with wealth. "Where did Mr. Cawthorne--the minister--get his money?"

"Oh ... oh ... I don't know. It was family money. It isn't important. He was a smart boy, Billy was--he went to the fancy schools and his father was going to send him to Harvard--that's the fanciest

God damn school of all--when old Lee went and changed his blue shirt for a grey one. That was the real start of the war, Fort Sumter and Lee's treason. At any rate, boys his age all over Boston were joining up. Lincoln--bless his sainted head--had called for four hundred thousand troops, volunteers, to beef up the men who were drafted, and the regular Army, soldiers like me. In some of those big fancy-shirt cities cowards rioted against the drafting of civilians into uniform but not Billy Cawthorne. He went up to his daddy and he said 'Daddy, I want to enlist. I want to help President Lincoln save the Union.' And you know what that old peckerwood said back to him? Said, 'Don't be a fool. I will buy your way out of the draft. I will just reach into my fat pocket here and buy your way out.' And that just made Bill sick. He tried and tried to change his father's mind, but being a man of the cloth with a fancy-dan college diploma, his father knew everything, or thought he did. 'Don't be a fool,' he told Billy. 'Stay at home. You'll be as safe a baby at his mother's sweet breast. Stay here.'

"And why should he not have stayed where he was, all fat and rich like that? I know men who thought he was forty times a fool for running out on all that high living and joining up ... but that is what he did. His father went to church one Sunday, and Billy stayed home, said he was sick. And when old Mr. Cawthorne was finished with his pieties, and came home, he found his best horse gone and his son atop it. Billy had taken off.

"Now Billy was smart and didn't ride straight into Boston to enlist. He knew that would be just what the reverend, his father,

expected him to do, and so he didn't even go into Boston at all. He rode hard and long all the way to New York City 'cause he knew he could disappear; his father could never find him. He sold his horse to the quartermaster--that's the officer who handles the horses--and joined up. Now remember what a good horse that was, and that he was a civilian when he sold it. Made him something of a wealthy soldier. And there would be no waste of that money. Billy knew better than that. Got in no card games and let no one know that he had it, so they couldn't steal it. He was a footloose lad and ... well, his outfit found itself in Pennsylvania, at Gettsburg. You heard of Gettysburg?"

"Oh, yes sir. Plenty. That was July third--"

"Right, right. Well I was there."

"You were?" Cary fairly shouted. "That was the biggest battle..." His words fell over one another in his excitement.

"That I was, lad." The Captain smiled at Cary's reaction. "My people were there. Why not? You see, lad, we were small, a company--we followed no general's orders ... most of the time, we did in Arkansas at the start of the war, but then we grew independent, you might say. Well, we were what you could call a tactical unit; we went wherever there was action, wherever we thought we could help the Union cause. Wherever there were rebels. Gettysburg was something new for us, though, being as it was in the North, and there are naturally more rebs in the South. Although God knows there were plenty of rebs in that little town in Pennsylvania. Hell, I was one of them!"

"One of them!"

"Yes ... you know ... disguises. Haas and I and some others, we dressed up in our rebel uniforms to infiltrate the rebel positions, but I am so far ahead of my story I may have to backtrack all the way home. Let me first tell you about Billy Cawthorne, and how he came to join us.

"Briefly, Billy was a damn smart lad, and he had corporal's stripes on his arms before he'd been in Union blue more than two months. This gave him a bit more independence than your ordinary soldier, which suited Billy because he had an independent mind anyhow. Smart as he was he quickly discovered that he was smarter than the damn fool officer overseeing his platoon, and he could get around him so easily that he was soon one of the better-off men in the whole company."

"What's that mean? 'Better-off?'"

"Just like it means in civilian life, lad. Ah ... I'm better-off than my nigger man William, because he's a nigger and he works for me. Your father, he's better-off than me because he has a bigger and better-established farm--and because he has forgotten more about farming than I would ever care to know. Billy had money won in dice and card games--I know, lad, it was indecent of him, but it was all he could do in that situation to improve and enlighten himself. He also knew the military way of life and how to profit from it better than most men who had been in uniform longer than he had been in skin. Me, for instance. I met him in June of 1863, a month before Gettysburg, in another town in Pennsylvania--I can't recall it ..."

The Captain lit another black cigar, thinking. "Don't suppose it matters much what the name of the town was. All of them little towns was alike to us. My boys and me--we were held up on a farm outside of this town where Billy Cawthorne's company was quartered until it was time for them to meet Lee. No one knew for sure when and where that snowybearded son of a bitch would make his move. Anyway, a couple of my men, Ralph Haas and a Catholic boy named St. John Murphy were in town fleecing some of the regulars. You know about fleecing, boy? Well, if you take a man's money the way you take a sheep's wool, and if he seems to have about as much to say about it as the sheep, you're fleecing him, and these two men of mine were doing just that to three bluecoat regulars in a ... a saloon which occasionally catered to somewhat disreputable and lewd vices sometimes engaged in by soldiers. Gambling is a vice but, I tell you lad, sometimes you have to do awful things to feed your company. Gambling ... well, that was one. They were gambling, playing poker, with these three men. Haas and Murphy teamed up to win ... one would go in and start a game or find one, and the other would just mosey on in and they'd behave as if each had never laid eyes on the other. Then they would work that table dry. Well, they did that easily this night. Those three regulars come into that place with money to burn and left without so much as a sincere handshake." The Captain grinned somewhat lewdly for an instant. "They were on their way back to camp, my boys, when they found Billy on their tail. He had watched the whole game and been on to them from the start. Before they could shoot him he told them as how he was

stuck fast in his own company and wondered as how he could ride with them for a spell. You see, boy, he had heard of Joseph's company. We had a sharp reputation and were all the time getting volunteers from regular units that had gone stale for ambitious men. Most weren't worth a damn and we fast got rid of them, but Billy--he had brains and guts. Ralph and St. John brought him on to me and I said he could stick with us least until he proved himself worth his meals. The poor lad--that didn't take long, but he never rode with us again. It happened just before the battle itself--we were down in Gettysburg then--when we were on a very dangerous espionage mission for General Meade himself."

Cary, rapt in the story and oblivious to the river and trees about them, gasped at the name. Meade was not a stellar name like Grant or Sherman, but it was well-recalled from the lessons and maps of Mr. Porter's school.

"You remember me saying that I was one of those rebels at Gettysburg. Well my boys and I--Haas and Murphy and Billy and two I do not recall--were masquerading as wandered members of Lee's army, the Army of Northern Virginia, going from place to place behind the rebel lines, always looking for 'our outfit' ... You know, we would come riding up to the rebel camp in our rebel outfits and the idiot reb sentry on the picket line would say 'Who goes there?' and I would say 'Captain Joseph Hiram and five men, Georgia Regulars, looking for our positions,' and of course there would be no such company, and he would tell us that this was not it. 'Well what's the next bunch over?' I would ask and that way my

people had time to get a good idea of the way they deployed their strength, and what was where.

"We had rode all that day around in Lee's Army, and I'd hoped we could get close enough to that old goat to snipe him, but we never did of course. That's too bad. But we did come to this little farm where the rebs had established something of a command post, around dark. It was a small farm, I suppose about the size of ... old Mr. Knutson's, you know?"

Cary nodded, surprised for a moment that the Captain knew Emma's father. The Captain caught the look and explained, "I've come to know almost every farm owner around our little town. That poor old fellow's lost his son, you know. He's having to sell of his land to keep the wolf from his door. Anyway, where was I? Oh yes. We fooled the guards by the gates easily enough and rode right on in. The place was frantic with rebels--must have been thirty of them standing around outside. I asked one what the situation was and was told that the farmer was a friend and was feeding everyone from his grain stocks! The traitorous dog was emptying his silo for rebels! I decided then and there to put a stop to this for good.

"Remembering names has always been one of my special talents, boy. A military officer should always know how to lie convincingly. I told the senior reb officer--he was a lieutenant--that Captain Behingus or whatever over on Little Round Top was being attacked--and there was such an officer at that place because I had met him--and everyone should ride out there right away and lend a hand. And

being as they were as dedicated to their cause in their own way as were to ours, the mass of them did just that, rode off licketty-split, leaving us there with that farmer, his family and maybe a dozen wounded Confederates in the barn and house. I gave them the story that me and my boys should stay behind and guard the place.

"No sooner were they gone than we drew our weapons and had the place secured. There was a doctor in the barn with the wounded and he set up a fuss and we had to shut him up, and make sure the wounded rebs didn't put up a fight. Then I placed that treacherous farmer under arrest. My God he was shocked to find we weren't real Confederates. He offered us everything he had to let him and his family go. It was disgusting to encounter that sort of low cowardice, combined with his treachery--I said we would take everything anyway.

"He had this daughter--he had a wife and a son and a daughter." The Captain was speaking rapidly and the smoke spewed from the moving corners of his mouth. "We tied up the boy with his father, down in the cellar. The women we held upstairs in their rooms. I had Haas and one of the other men guard the mother and I said 'Billy, as you are such a good boy, you may take care of the daughter.' She was a pretty little thing of fifteen or sixteen. He took her upstairs to guard her in her room."

Cary saw himself, clad in counterfeit grey, smiling kindly upon Emma, trussed comfortably but firmly to a chair. He would let no harm come to her, he pledged. He would be back at war's end ...

"The rebs we knew would not be away for very long. The men who weren't busy with the wife and daughter, and making sure the

wounded rebels didn't make a fuss, we hurried ourselves loading grain, food, onto rebel horses to take back to our camp. Why should the rebels have these comforts and not loyal Americans? We sampled what we could and loaded up what we could not.

"An hour, I think, went by. We had to get out of there quickly, because those rebs were bound to work their way to wherever I had sent them--"

"Little Round Top."

"Yes--and then they would find no battle in progress and find how they had been tricked. My company already had a reputation with the rebs, too. We trussed up the farmer's wife but Billy had not yet come down from the daughter's room and I have never felt it just to interrupt a man at his business. Finally, however, I decided to go ahead and go on in.

"I will not forget it, ever. I went up those stairs and saw the smoke coming from underneath the door--and I kicked it down. It had been locked, of course. There was so much smoke and heat that I had to leave, get out of there right away, but I saw enough through the smoke to know what had happened. Oh God, it was awful.

"They were both dead. That little girl had had a knife hid someplace in her bed where she could get at it, probably for protection against any rebel soldier that got fresh. Poor Billy was not used to such things and did not know what to watch out for. He got stabbed straight in. I could see the knife in him.

"The girl must have run to the window and lit a lantern to signal with. I have to give all credit to the Confederates for that

idea; apparently she had a signal-lantern to send messages to the nearest camp, if need be. They were well-prepared. But Billy had not died before he had pulled her back from the window and smashed her lantern on the floor. I suppose the oil set the bed sheets on fire. They were on the floor, both dead.

"It was terrible. We had to leave him there, nothing to do for him anyway. The fire was sure to attract the rebels' attention, and what if that girl had gotten off her signal? We left that place burning, and rode until dawn back to camp. Every one of us, Haas and Murphy and myself, we wept, boy, we wept. Billy had just come to us; we had just come to know him. But I tell you this, and if you are as smart as I see you are, you will take it into mind: Billy Cawthorne died a brave man. He came into the war of the rebellion a coddled boy and he left it a strong soldier any true man would be proud to salute."

The Captain sighed softly twice or three times. "I was like that, like Billy, when I was young. Always wanted to get over that next hill to find the hill after that. Dangerous journey, yes, but I would rather be alive--moving--even if it is dangerous."

The Captain laughed shyly, and shook himself out of his revery as if from drowsiness. "This is not getting us our objective." He rose tall to his feet and stretched. "We shall follow the river up into the mountains." Cary's heart flashed.

"Oh not all the way--it is too cold and too far. But if we follow this obvious path into them, it is along this river that we'll find our buck. That's a lesson, lad. When you track something,

follow the river. It is the place to which it must always return. If you know a deer, a goat, a man, has got to come back to a place, you have him as good as caught, as good as on your table."

The Captain washed his frying pan as Cary kicked dirt over the fire. They returned to their horses, remounted, and with the Captain in the lead trotted gently uphill, keeping close to the tumbling Bebehanna. They rode silently, as if the Captain's long story had exhausted them both, but Cary felt a deep sadness and strange excitement both as he rode.

Soon the slope was steep and the forest seemed thinner to Cary the higher they rode. His ears ached suddenly and relief came only when he yawned, still sleepy from the early rising. The air was not only cool now, the breeze was actually chilly. For an hour they rode steadily, and Cary let his mind dim sleepily and started alert from a half doze when he found himself abreast of Captain Joseph and the Captain's hand clutching at his reins. He looked at the weathered face in startled bewilderment and received in answer a shush, finger held to pursed mouth.

They had reached a level spot in the path of the river, now much more narrow and shallow than it had been before. They looked down from the shelter of a small stand of firs on a clearing by a pool. Two red deer stood drinking at the pool's edge. Cary caught his breath. A doe and fawn, old enough to have lost its spots but not yet grown. The doe was alert, her red-brown body still as a tree, her great eyes wide on the firs behind which Cary and the Captain watched. The fawn leaned its muzzle into the pool and Cary saw its gullet pulse with swallows.

"Don't even breathe," the Captain murmured. "You don't move, you're part of the scenery."

The doe moved a hoof.

"She's watching these trees, not us. Don't rustle the branches. Wait."

Wait? Cary had not moved. The stare of the female deer was mesmerizing. Captain Joseph slowly, in the fuzzy edge of Cary's vision, reached back and Cary heard his rifle being drawn from its sheath.

"Wait for the buck," he whispered. "We want the daddy, the big one. He will be here by and by."

They waited. After a few moments the doe relaxed her stance of vigilance and drank next to her fawn. Cary and the Captain waited, not speaking or moving. Cary smoothed his hand again and again down Nibble's shoulder, keeping her quiet. Beside him the Captain carefully lifted himself from his saddle and lowered himself to the ground. The deer did not react.

Cary felt his heart bumping rapidly. From the Captain he gained confidence that the doe and fawn were indeed waiting for the head of the family. He had seen deer before, of course, but never on purpose, never after stalking them, never as a hunter.

Captain Joseph was moving slowly around behind Nibble, his own horse tied to the trees hiding them. Cary turned and asked with a look if he should follow but the Captain shushed him, and with the same gesture motioned him to stay where he was and watch the clearing. He disappeared into the brush, making enough noise

to cause a momentary cautious look from the doe, but she soon dipped her head once more. They're thirsty enough, Cary thought.

He watched the delicate and beautiful movement of the doe's limbs as she stepped to and from the pool, finally reclining in the grass. The fawn curled against her and for a long time Cary heard his heart beat and the birds call and the wind from the mountains touch leaves to leaves. It was quiet for a long time and nothing moved in the clearing but the eyes of the doe and the tail of the fawn, twitching, a red spot in its yellowish-white rump. Cary breathed in a slow, gentle rhythm, and found himself losing the tension the wait had built in him. He no longer felt as if he waited for something, but like the doe and the fawn simply sat in the high cool air. The feeling spread in him from his breath to his arms and down his whole length, and even spread to Nibble, who stood still and quiet herself now, her breaths long and deep. Cary McMillan sat atop his horse as the fawn curled against its mother.

Then the stillness was gone.

The stag arrived so swiftly and so silently that Cary gasped aloud at its sudden appearance. It stood in the center of the clearing, above its mate and spawn, looking towards the river. It was big and the horns arched from its brow to six high points on each. They were like the white limbs on the birches by the McMillan house, bare in winter. The stag stepped smoothly to the water's edge, each step silent and sure, powerful. It stood above the water a moment, gazing over its width to the woods across. Then the great black nose dropped. The deer drank from the river.

"Now, lad!"

The gunshot exploded in the clearing; the sound burst into Cary's brain. He shrieked. Nibble reared back slightly. The clearing was a blur of moving hide. The doe and fawn were white rumps vanishing into the brush; the buck staggered, its hooves in the river, off balance. Cary heard it bleat and bleat as it flailed desperately at the bank with its hooves. The wounded flank swung about towards Cary. He realized with a cold flush of horror from his fingers to his face that the bullet had knocked the stag almost full into the Bebehanna.

"Lad! Shoot, lad!"

Cary flailed around behind him, found the rifle stock in its scabbard and somehow pulled the rifle into his hands. He raised it into the branches of the firs, struggled it through the needles. He ducked his head to the sights and squeezed on the trigger. It would not give. Damn! He hadn't cocked the rifle!

The deer reached the river bank. Its huge eyes wavered side to side. There was one aim in them, burning and crazy, and Cary understood it as sure as he understood anything as he whipped the rifle again to his shoulder and found one of those mad, flaming eyes along the sights: escape.

He did not hear the noise. The deer went down forward over its forelegs, the head snapping from the bullet, which had caught it beneath one tall horn. It kicked in the air, hooves rustling leaves. From a place across the clearing from Cary the Captain rose and blundered forth, his hat slipping to one side, and stood triumphant over the shuddering deer.

"You got him!" the Captain shouted. "Got him, boy!"

Nibble was pulling away from the firs, spooked by the gunshots. The boy had to struggle to keep her from turning and galloping downhill. He jumped from her back and tied her swiftly to the nearest tree, then crashed through into the clearing where Captain Joseph stood and smiled. My God, he thought. The deer was bigger than the Captain! God it was huge, laying there, smashed at head and hip.

"You got it, lad!" The Captain grabbed the boy and with one arm whirled him, feet high, in the air over the fallen stag. "What a hunter!" Released, Cary grinned back. He felt a holy exaltation, felt like shouting hallelujah at the top of his lungs.

"You know what you got here? See all those points? It's a royal hart, boy." The Captain reached to touch a tine, his face aglow with awe. "It's the most beautiful buck there is."

"Yes ... yes ..." Cary gasped.

"Well, now the work begins." Captain Joseph bent and grasped the forelegs by the hooves. "Is he dead yet? Yes." He gripped the hooves together and straddling, reached back to the hindlegs. A look of puzzlement clouded his face. Cary wondered what he could do to help. Finally the Captain released the deer and straightened. "This is not working. We have to get this beast strung up and get rid of its insides before we can take it back. It must weigh three hundred pounds. Get me the rope on my saddle."

Cary fetched the thick coil. Captain Joseph looped it over a limb ten feet high and tied one end of it to the deer's hindlegs.

Together they hoisted the buck up until its forelegs' hooves dangled a couple of inches off the ground. The limb bent a bit with the weight. The rope was secured to the trunk of another tree, and with the deer suspended in the air Captain Joseph pulled his hunting knife from his belt. The flies came up as the deer was emptied, and Cary stayed back from the mess, but it didn't last long. Soon the Captain was kneeling by the pool washing his arms and knife and saying, "It's an intolerable mess but my horse will stand up much better without all that weight."

The Captain's gelding was led into the clearing, and positioned beneath the carcass. The stink made him skittish; Cary had to hold him steady while Captain Joseph lowered the dead deer onto his back.

Smelling of burnt leaves and fresh shit, and covered with flies along the gash the Captain had cut and the bullet wounds, the carcass seemed a wholly different thing to Cary from the magnificent stag which had bound into that clearing a few moments earlier. Cary looked down at his hands, which were crusted with dirt and blood. To think that two little bullets, two pulls of this finger, could make such a difference. It was astonishing ... and somehow, marvelous.

As the Captain lashed the buck secure to his horse's back, and as they rode double on Nibble down the river, Cary turned to watch the creature's destroyed head bob with every step the gelding took. An overtaste of sadness tried to climb into the boy's euphoria, but he did not allow it close.

He turned forward to face again the Captain's broad brown back. He found with pleasure that he could see over his shoulder, that he

had grown, without knowing it, close to the man's height. The Captain sang an old camp song. Cary felt like laughing, and singing along. Pa would be proud. Oh, he might frown in that way of his, and seem to disapprove, but that was just Pa, that was just his act for God. Inside, he would be proud, really. And Edward would be mad as hell--with envy. Ma would roast them some venison steaks. And, could be, he would bring a shank to Emma. Yes, to Emma, and her hungry folks, he would come, not like the humble farmer's son they knew, not as the slow schoolboy she knew, but as a hunter, a tracker, a strong man.